

One or more Master Studies on the Theme of “Activation and Mobilization of Social Capital”

Social capital has been defined “...as the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilized through that network.” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 243) Social units can be individual and collective actors, such as organizations (Sorenson and Rogan, 2014). The resources actors access through their social relationships can comprise material resources, information, or emotional resources such as friendship or compassion. Research on social capital has shown that the resources accessed through social relationships benefit actors in various ways (Burt et al., 2013; Kwon and Adler, 2014), though some negative implications of social capital have also been noted (Pillai et al., 2017).

At any given time, actors have many social contacts who potentially could provide resources. However, when seeking to obtain resources from their social contacts, actors activate only some of their ties (i.e. approach select members of their network), and will commonly only receive resources from some of these (i.e. succeed to mobilize only some of their contacts to provide resources) (Shea et al., 2015). For instance, a founder of a business seeking finance will approach some selection of his/her contacts, and only some of the approached contacts will actually provide financing for the venture.

When seeking to explain the performance and other outcomes of actors’ social capital, research has typically focused on the structure of actors’ networks, the position of actors within these networks, and the types of relationships actors entertain with their contacts (Borgatti and Foster, 2003; Burt, 2005). That is, research has mainly focused on the network of all contacts of a given actor. Moreover, it has not always observed actual resource flows. Research has thus tended to neglect that the actual resource flow to the focal actor that realizes his/her social capital originates from only a fraction of the actor’s network.

To address this gap, the present Master Thesis should find and review empirical and conceptual studies that shed light on one, some, or all of the following questions:

- (1) Which attributes of the focal actor, his/her network contacts, and/or situational contingencies influence the selection of contacts that an actor activates within his/her network, i.e. approaches with a request for resource provision? Which theories help to explain this selection?
- (2) Which attributes of the focal actor, his/her network contacts, and/or situational contingencies influence whether or not a contact who is approached actually provides the requested resources? Which theories help to explain this resource provision?
- (3) Do the attributes / contingencies identified in questions (1) and (2) depend on the type of resource sought or obtained? On other contingencies? Why?

Technically speaking, the Master Thesis should thus look for and review studies that identify moderators of network → outcome relationships. Depending on the number of studies identified, the Master Thesis could concentrate on studies that focus on particular outcomes, e.g. creativity or information transfer. Or it could concentrate on particular moderators. Or if only few studies identify moderators, it could compare studies across different outcome variables.

The Master Thesis can be written in German or English.

References

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Some Initial Studies Identifying Moderators

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